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ABSTRACT

This paper contrasts the behavioral and non-behavioral approaches to counseling, particularly the interview process. A brief discussion of basic theoretical assumptions is included. In behavioral counseling, the relationship can best be characterized as collaboration, and unlike non-behaviorists, the behavioral counselor can assist his client to acquire the needed skills necessary to function more adaptively in his surroundings. In the assessment process, behavioral counseling, in contrast to traditional techniques, is data oriented in that it provides a baseline against which both client and counselor can evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts toward change and can decide on the methods which work best. Behaviorists then direct their attention to the antecedent events in the environment which may have served as cues for the problem behavior. Based on this analysis, the client and counselor can plan specific changes in the environment. The final step is the evaluation of the therapeutic effectiveness by observing changes in the rate of the target behavior. (KJ)

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BEHAVIORAL VS. NON-BEHAVIORAL COUNSELING:

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Dwight L. Goodwin, Ph.D.

Contrasts drawn between the methods of behavioral and non-behavioral counseling must recognize the formidable distance lying between their respective theoretical foundations. Perhaps it is in the rarified atmosphere of theory that these contrasts can be most nearly drawn. Certainly direct observations of counselor behavior might yield considerably less distinct outlines between the two approaches. Indeed, in some instances and without a program, the behavioral counselor could not be distinguished from his non-behavioral counterpart. After all, as counselors we do not hesitate to use whatever techniques we believe can provide our client with the most efficient help possible to the solution of his problems. The good clinician will use whatever tools he has at his disposal without first determining their compatibility with this or that particular theory. Consequently, I shall attempt to delineate the differences between behavioral and non-behavioral methods as they might be inferred from their theoretical underpinnings, rather than making normative comparisons between two such groups of practitioners.

Although the primary contrasts to be drawn in this paper will concern the interview process, a brief diversion into basic theoretical assumptions must be included as a basis for further remarks. The non-behavioral counselor makes the assumption that the client's problem is an expression of certain affective and cognitive states which, if modified through insight, increased awareness and self acceptance, can be reduced or eliminated. Again, emphasis is placed on the operation of intervening states as the target for therapeutic interventions.

The non-behavioral counselor typically avoids a directing, teaching or structuring role in his therapeutic efforts as behavioral outcomes, if they do occur, are seen as secondary to changes in the self perception and self regard of the client.

In contrast, the behavioral counselor focuses ppon the specific problem behavior defined by the client. The methodology of behavioral counseling is drawn mainly from learning theory and the dimensions of developmental psychology as defined recently by Bijou. The primary theoretical assumption is that behavior is acquired, maintained or eliminated by the environment. Thus, client difficulties are regarded as the result of deficient behavioral repertories and/or failures of the client to discriminate relevant cues in his environment. Methods to aid the client must be capable of promoting the acquisition of needed skills and increasing the client's discrimination of significant cues in his environment. The role adopted by the behavior counselor is therefore quasi-educational in nature and may include aspects of directing, teaching and structuring in addition to the rapport building elements of the more traditional approaches.

How these opposing theories are implemented will be examined in the dimensions of the counseling process. By this I mean one, establishing of rapport, two, identifying the problem, three, assessing factors related to the problem and four, developing a resolution to the presenting problem. As this covers a broad array of possible comparisons, attention will be directed to specific aspects of this process as they provide a basis for discriminating between the tactics of the behavioral and non-behavioal counselor.

To begin with, both approaches involve procedures designed to establish a working relationship with the client. Although a "working relationship"

is difficult to define behaviorally, there is probably common agreement that the counselor, both behavioral and non-behavioral must do such things as reflect feelings, restate what the client has said to be sure that communication is straight, ask questions and provide some information regarding the service the counselor is prepared to offer. Although in my personal view, the counseling relationship would dissolve without these elements, there is little research evidence to sustain this belief or even to suggest that responses directed by a computer program might not permit as effective assistance as that provided by a warm body making the same vocalizations.

As has been shown, many commonalities exist between the two models in establishing rapport and identifying in general terms, the client's problem. It is at this point, however, that the two approaches begin to diverge.

Although both approaches encourage the counselee to talk about the array of thoughts and feelings that have caused him to seek help, the behavioral counselor begins at once to seek a clarification of these events in terms of what specific behaviors were involved and the various environmental events which were associated with those behaviors. A major difference between the two opposing theories begins to emerge at this point. While the non-behavioral counselor encourages the client to respond to what ever feelings he may be experiencing during this episode, the behavioral counselor helps the client to select from the array of possible problem areas, a single target behavior to consider as a starting point for their continuing collaboration. An additional distinction is suggested at this point. The behavioral counselor enjoins the client to shoulder responsibility for the selection of a specific problem that he wishes to consider rather than relying upon the counselor for subtle guidance in its resolution.

What is being suggested here is that in behavioral counseling, the relationship can be best characterized as a collaboration--a joint assumption of responsibility for selecting a target, collecting the data about its frequency, the conditions under which it can be expected to occur, and for planning a treatment strategy. As the problem is regarded as having resulted from inadequate or faulty learning, there is no reason why the counselor must continue to occupy a position of an observer but can instead, move in a straightforward manner to assist his client to acquire the needed discriminations or skills necessary to function more adaptively to his surroundings.

In the assessment process, differences between the two approaches become marked. The behavioral counselor first has helped his client carefully define the targets for change.. Using Lindsley's terminology, these behaviors have been identified as acceleration or deceleration targets. Early in the assessment process, attempts are made to get a baserate of these targets with respect to frequency over a given period of time. This may be done by observations in the family or classroom, self recording by the client or by others such as volunteers, teachers or aides. Data collection of this type, when it doesn't possess certain therapeutic properties of its own, permits a more objective evaluation of treatment procedures than the counselor's own conviction of their usefulness. Behavioral counseling, in contrast to more traditional techniques, is data oriented in the sense of providing a baseline against which both client and counselor can evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts toward change and can decide on the specific methods that work best in learning new behaviors or in eliminating unwanted responses.

After collecting baseline information, the counselor and counselee

direct their attention to the antecedent events in the environment which may have served as cues for the problem behavior. Variables are reviewed for possible relevance to the target behavior, such as where the problem occurs, the particular task being performed, with whom, at what time of the day, etc. A similar analysis of consequent events is explored to see if the environment may be sustaining the problem behavior by reinforcing it when it occurs. A talk with the principal for example, may be a powerful reinforcer for certain kinds of disruptive classroom behavior. It has been suggested that even rage possesses several important reward features in addition to whatever other cathartic values may be involved.

It may be important to discover whether the behavior is self reinforcing. That is, following the Premack principle, does depression for instance have self reinforcing consequences, such as the intensity of feelings regarding self, or the responses of absolving oneself from responsibility for surrounding events. Even the reiteration of beliefs regarding the futility of life may be negatively reinforcing an unwillingness to change one's behavior.

In summary, the behavioral counselor has carefully analyzed the target behaviors with respect to the following questions: a) i.e. "How often do they occur over a given period of time?" b) "What are the possible environmental cues for the behavior, and under what conditions can they be expected to occur?" c) What reinforcers may be present in the client's social system to support the conflict or problem? and lastly, d) What elements of the problem behavior may be self-reinforcing for the counselee? Based on this analysis, the client and counselor can begin to plan specific changes in the environment. The model suggested by Goldiamond for marital counseling seems relevant.

In contrast the non-behavioral counselor directs the client to consider possible relationships between his feelings and events he experiences in his daily life. The exploration of antecedents in terms of early history or other relationships is pursued. The objective of the assessment phase in non-behavioral counseling is designed to help the counselor and client understand the possible dynamics underlying the problem and thus suggest specific techniques the counselor may use to increase counselee awareness.

In describing treatment interventions, the most marked divergence occurs between the two approaches. For the behavioral counselor, the strategies for change cover a broad range of techniques and depend upon whether the target behavior is to be accelerated or decelerated. If a deceleration target is selected, strategies are invoked which will: 1. help the client to recognize cues which signal the onset of the problem or conflict situation, 2. reduce the probability that the problem behavior is reinforced and finally, 3. plan events to strengthen competing responses.

A female graduate student suffered a compulsion to move through her apartment checking again and again to see that her rooms were clean even after a thorough housecleaning had been completed. This ritual often consumed hours of valuable time. She was assisted in discriminating the cues existing in her own environment which served to trigger the checking and cleaning behavior. Secondly, arrangements were made to substitute another response when those cues presented themselves. Lastly, as she experienced a lack of social skills preventing her from making friends, a program was instituted to help her increase her repertory of social responses. This consisted of role playing episodes in the consulting room, ventures out of the apartment to meet neighboring students and ultimately, helping her adapt to an increasing array of social demands.

The foregoing summary illustrates how a client was helped to reduce and ultimately eliminate a deceleration target by the application of psycho-educational techniques based on learning theory. The acceleration target of increasing social skills might have included group counseling methods geared to provide prosocial models, reinforcing approximations of these by group members and firming of these newly learned responses by in-vivo application.

The final step in the counselee-counselor collaboration is the evaluation of the therapeutic effectiveness by observing changes in the rate of the target behavior. The increased social competency and the decreased compulsive behavior in the example provided evidence that the therapeutic design had been effective. Were these results not obtained, the attempt made would have provided additional data for decision making and contingency management.

The non-behavioral counselor also may employ a broad variety of methods from role playing to confrontation. However, the client's desire to change and his understanding of the meaning of that change are ordinarily regarded as an endpoint for further therapeutic procedures. This is likely dictated by the non-behavioral counselor's desire to avoid any activity which might abrogate the client's own responsibility for change.

In summary, the behavioral counselor has been shown to pursue an approach to treatment based on the assumption that the client's problem is a function of either faulty discriminations or deficient behavioral repertories. Treatment consists of a careful analysis of the environmental contingencies and a program for behavior change generated in the consultation relationship between the counselor and his client. Emphasis is placed

upon a precise definition of the target behaviors and the ongoing collection of data regarding the rate of this behavior. The behavioral analysis is followed by the application of psycho-educational techniques for promoting change.

The non-behavioral counselor emphasizes the human encounter as the principle element for enabling change and promoting continued personal growth. Specific behaviors tend to be regarded as expressions of the client's inner life and are therefore less significant than the self perceptions of the client as a target for therapeutic efforts.

Both behavioral and non-behavioral efforts must use the same channel for promoting change; that is, the counselor-counselee relationship. In the early stages of generating rapport and learning about the problem, perhaps few differences might be observed between the two counseling methods. Only as the relationship proceeds through assessment and strategy planning, do inherent differences in approach become vividly evident.